

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5438

As of February 8, 2017

Title: An act relating to promoting the completion of environmental impact statements within two years.

Brief Description: Promoting the completion of environmental impact statements within two years.

Sponsors: Senators Braun, Angel, Bailey, Rivers, Becker, O'Ban, Schoesler, Brown, Warnick, King, Honeyford, Fortunato, Baumgartner, Rossi, Sheldon, Wilson and Takko.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Energy, Environment & Telecommunications: 2/08/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Promotes completing environmental impact statements within 24 months.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Staff: Kelsey Morfitt (786-7407)

Background: The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) applies to decisions made by state and local agencies, including counties, cities, ports, and special districts. SEPA provides a framework to consider the environmental consequences of a proposed project prior to taking action on the proposal.

The SEPA process begins with a permit application or an agency proposal. For most proposals, one agency is designated as the lead agency.

The environmental review process involves a project applicant completing an environmental checklist to identify and evaluate probable environmental impacts, and to develop mitigation measures that will reduce adverse environmental impacts. The lead agency reviews this checklist to determine whether the proposal is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Next, the lead agency makes an environmental threshold determination on the significance of the environmental impact. This can be a determination of nonsignificance, a mitigated determination of nonsignificance, or a determination of significance. A determination of significance requires an environmental impact statement (EIS).

Unless an exemption applies, local governments and state agencies must prepare an EIS for major actions that significantly affect the quality of the environment. The EIS must include detailed information about the environmental impact of the proposed action, any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the proposal is implemented, and alternatives, including mitigation, to the proposed action.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature finds that the state should promote timely completion of the SEPA process. A lead agency should aspire to complete each EIS within 24 months, if not sooner.

If a lead agency takes more than 24 months to complete an EIS, the lead agency must submit a brief report to the Legislature explaining why the EIS is late, when the EIS will be completed, and a plan of action to prevent future tardiness.

A lead agency is not subject to civil liability due to a late EIS.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: None.

Persons Testifying: No one.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.